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## **Politics in the Informalizing Metropolis: Displacement, Resettlement and Unstable Negotiations in Uncivil Ahmedabad**

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# **Politics in the Informalizing Metropolis: Displacement, Resettlement and Unstable Negotiations in Uncivil Ahmedabad**

by Caleb Johnston

## **Abstract**

This article documents the displacement of Baoris, an adivasi (indigenous) community living in the city of Ahmedabad, India, and their subsequent resettlement along the city's precarious urban-rural frontier. I argue that this process signals the informalization of rights and territories, representing a political regime of governing in the remaking of the contemporary Indian metropolis. Recent actions taken by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation to evict Baoris from the inner city are situated within the entangled processes and politics of urban restructuring, liberalization and Hindu nationalism. The absence and erosion of democratic protections, however, has not precluded the possibility of political negotiations with the local agents of state and capital, and this article assesses the tactics that community residents have deployed in their bid to maintain claims to territory, labour and services. I end by tempering enthusiasm for the informalizing city as a site for realizing alternative forms of justice and possible democratization.

## Arrival scene

Travelling along University Street in the city of Ahmedabad, India, the community of Baori Samaj is partially obscured beyond a dusty field where young men congregate to play cricket on an improvised pitch. Several makeshift vending stalls are erected on one side of the roadway. Turning off the thoroughfare, Baori Samaj fans out in a concentration of homes: the more solid are built of bricks and mortar; others are tents of plastic sheeting with earth floors. Large stones weigh down roofs of corrugated tin, positioned to resist the seasonal winter winds and torrential monsoon rains. Home to approximately 10,000 *adivasis*,<sup>1</sup> Baori Samaj is a large *basti*<sup>2</sup> (unauthorized settlement) situated in central Ahmedabad. While not the city's largest *basti*, it is among its oldest. Formerly an itinerant group from the neighbouring state of Rajasthan, these Baoris migrated to Ahmedabad in the aftermath of what is remembered in the community as the devastating famine of 1857.

In 2002, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) demolished 448 Baori homes in Gulbai Tekra (just west of the city centre). This article documents recent actions taken by the AMC to expel Baoris from the inner city, and we follow their

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<sup>1</sup> *Adivasis* are widely considered to be the indigenous peoples of India. According to the 2001 census, Scheduled Tribes (ST), those *adivasi* groups classified by the state, represent approximately 8% of the national population. While the Indian state does not recognize the indigeneity of *adivasis*, there exists a long history of affirmative action and territorial recognition of identified ST populations (see Corbridge, 2000; Ghosh, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> There are two broad types of insecure housing in Ahmedabad. *Chawls* are the tenements built in the early twentieth century to house workers engaged in textile manufacturing. Once vibrant working-class neighbourhoods situated in the eastern part of the city, *chawls* have become concentrated sites of poverty. Scattered throughout Ahmedabad, *bastis* are unauthorized settlements characterized by various forms of tenure on private and public lands. While the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation argues that there has been a decrease in the number of extra-legal settlements since 1991, it concedes its *basti* population has doubled in that time (AMC, 2006). If one combines those living in *bastis* and *chawls*, the proportion of people living in what UN-Habitat considers slum conditions approaches 40% of the population.

expulsion out to the urban–rural frontier. I argue that informality is mobilized through state practices to suspend Baoris’ claims to territory and services, and in doing so represents a political regime of governing in liberalizing Ahmedabad. I work with Roy’s (2005: 148) admonishment to move past dichotomous notions of the informal, and rather work toward its understanding as an expansive ‘mode of urbanization’ operating through ‘an organizing logic; a system of norms that govern the process of urban transformation’. Informalization is thus situated at the core of state strategies that enforce a regulatory miasma in the everyday lives of Baoris, and simultaneously drive the production of elite space and new policy regimes that seek to seduce capital in the remaking of the metropolis. I plan to complicate any easy division between the informal and formal, and the civil and uncivil, in an urban topography wherein informality is tied to particular constellations of power working through the entanglement of class, caste and violence. Baoris’ eviction to the urban edge is set against the socio-political landscape of Gujarat; whether we consider the proliferation of special economic zones, the unmaking of unionized labour, growth of spectral housing, urban renewal or civic governance increasingly steered by private capital, Gujarat remains ‘ground zero’ for aggressive Indian experiments in economic liberalization (Breman, 2004; Gidwani, 2008). In Ahmedabad, we also continue to witness informality and liberalization intersecting with a muscular Hindu nationalism in the production of a globalizing Hinduized metropolis (Corbridge and Harriss, 2000).

In addressing questions of sovereignty within regimes of informalization, I am not simply interested in the technologies of discipline and rule. In many respects, this research began with an interest in what Holston (2007) describes (writing of Brazil’s

*favelas*) as ‘insurgent citizenship’, i.e. how insurgency movements in the informal world expand the political by reconfiguring the terrain of democratic politics. The informalizing world continues to generate considerable scholarly attention as the setting for radical politics that move from ‘quiet encroachments’ (Bayat, 2004) to ‘deep democracy’ (Appadurai, 2001), ‘new ways of life’ (AlSayyad, 2004) to progressive ‘civic governmentality’ (Roy, 2009a). In Gulbai Tekra, I may not have encountered a space of radical insurgency, but one that nonetheless complicates notions of city and citizenship through quotidian forms of resistance. For Baoris, living and working in extra-legal conditions has not precluded possibilities for negotiations with the local agents of state and capital. This motivates situating Baoris’ organizing within a spatiality that Chatterjee (2004) describes as ‘political society’ — a nebulous sphere of popular politics wherein ‘rights’ are negotiated outside a normative terrain of justice. I end by tempering political society and the politics of informals as sites for realizing alternative forms of justice and democratization.

This article draws on 14 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Ahmedabad. I worked through social networks that opened up in the city. I observed and scripted a field journal, which provided a rich descriptive account of the research process and a means by which to contextualize testimonies and to understand how meanings are situational and narrated in relation to specific social spaces and cultural contexts. I took photographs and conducted interviews; like a magpie, I gleaned compelling narratives and life experiences — many of which have been translated into this article. There were also important collaborative strategies and methods that emerged in my research with Baoris. For instance, I spent two months making street video with Baoris in collaboration with a

professional filmmaker from Vancouver. Together we created a series of short documentary films that animated local issues identified, scripted and filmed by community residents; these works were seen by several thousand people in a number of street screenings. As part of this collaboration, I donated a computer and hand-held video cameras to Vidya, a street theatre society of which Baoris are among the founding members. Considered as an important site for what Richa Nagar and Susan Geiger (2007: 273) describe as ‘situated solidarities’, this video-making emerged directly out of the desires of Baoris to access the skills and technologies of digital video production. My ethnographic work with Baoris was part of a broader research programme in the city, one involving extended research in a second *adivasi* community, as well as a long list of recorded and transcribed interviews conducted with civil rights workers, community leaders, NGOs and city planners.

### **Living beyond the pale**

With a long history of itinerant activity in northwestern India, Baoris have been settled in Ahmedabad for well over a century. Unlike many others migrating to Ahmedabad during the nineteenth century, Baoris never accessed formal employment in industrial textile manufacturing. Excluded from unionized jobs and membership in powerful trade unions, they integrated themselves into informal economies. They sold oxen before the introduction of mechanized agriculture and, during Ahmedabad’s boom years of textile production, Baoris made rope out of rejected yarn, selling it in the local bazaar economy. Most recently, Baoris have used their expertise as artisans to produce plaster statues. Considered to be men’s work, statue-making pervades every nook of public space in

Gulbai Tekra. Many Baori women work as domestics in the homes of the surrounding middle classes, typifying the gendered division of informal labour markets whereby women occupy the lowest-paid jobs. The early evenings often find young Baori men working the busy intersections along C.G. Road or the Law Gardens, hawking belts and watches. While Baoris may not be on the lowest rung of the urban economy, they struggle with persistent poverty, and their shared toil illustrates the ingenuity required to survive near the bottom of the labour hierarchy as craftspeople and domestics.

Baoris live and work at the fringe of legality. Their labour is undertaken in direct transgression of the bylaws governing the use and access of public territory. They are considered by municipal authorities to be illegal occupiers of public land with no rights of tenure. Baoris' quasi-illegality, however, does not suggest a space void of regulation. In the absence of legitimate claims to services, residents have nonetheless secured marginal access to rudimentary civic amenities through a variety of informal tactics. For decades, Baoris have tapped electricity off the main city grid by running illicit power lines to individual homes. While a water main was being dug through the area, Baoris managed to bribe municipal workers to build an unauthorized junction pipe that brought communal water taps into the community. Their labour, tenure and negotiation of services refocuses informality as not simply political economy, but rather what AlSayyad (2004: 15) describes as a 'lived experience' that frames the everyday lives of the urban poor. Baoris have thus long deployed what Bayat (2004: 90) argues to be the 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary' — the actions through which 'quiet rebels' (Bayat, 2000: 533) lay claims in ways that contravene the territories of the propertied.



Importantly, Baoris' transgressions have been tacitly allowed by the state, suggesting a spatial politics wherein any dealings with such communities imply a tacit acknowledgment of various extra-legal practices. As a result, local state actors must deal with the poor as exceptions to the rule of law; it is precisely because so many labour in informal economies and inhabit territory with illicit tenure that the state has to devise ways of governing without disrupting the sanctity of property and legality. 'There is thus an entire set of para-legal arrangements', argues Chatterjee (2004: 56), 'that can grow to deliver civic services and welfare benefits to population groups whose very habitation lies on the other side of legality'. As exceptions to the formal rule of law, it is only through a number of implicit arrangements that Baoris have maintained tenuous claims to territory and labour in the metropolis. This extra-legal accommodation, however, is always provisional; by its very nature, Baoris' 'right to the city' is highly unstable, dependent on an exceptionality that can be revoked whenever it suits the objectives of state and capital.

### **Suspending the right of the exception**

Baoris' tacit agreement with the AMC was suspended in 2002, when the city demolished 448 homes in Gulbai Tekra, an action that displaced a third of the community from the inner city. The AMC had tried previously to expel Baoris, but residents were successful in securing a stay order from the High Court of Gujarat temporarily blocking demolitions. The city government took the issue to the Supreme Court of India in New Delhi. It won the case, legitimizing the slum clearance on the basis that Baoris were illegally occupying an 80-foot-wide roadway outlined in its town planning scheme. This is a familiar strategy

deployed by the planning apparatus across India, where town planning is mobilized to displace the poor who are framed as illegal usurpers of public territory, and a threat to health, security and planning (Baviskar, 2003; Bhan and Menon-Sen, 2007). Authorizing the destruction of homes, the AMC's court order reflects the Indian judiciary's increasing role in the process of urban dispossession. While there may be nothing particularly new about slum demolitions in India, many argue that, over the past decade, we have witnessed a reorientation of the courts as to whose rights take precedence under the rule of law and a narrowing of the judiciary's interpretation of fundamental rights, specifically those enshrined in the 'right to life' clause in article 21 of the constitution (Ramanathan, 2002; 2006; Shukla, 2006; Ghertner, 2008; Bhan, 2009). Baoris vehemently opposed the razing of homes, in large measure because they claim that the city government utilized its court order to illegally clear territory that remains under private ownership.

There is a great deal of ambiguity regarding the ownership of land in Gulbai Tekra. Originally, the entire area was under the private title of a Parsi landlord who permitted Baoris to settle in the area in exchange for the payment of rent. During the 1960s, ownership passed to two new proprietors, one of whom was elected a city councillor. After having assumed political office, the city councillor sold his land in Gulbai Tekra to the AMC. The details of the transaction remain unclear. The landlord either sold the territory of his own volition, or the state exercised eminent domain through the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 — the primary means by which state agencies appropriate land for 'public' purposes.<sup>3</sup> Regardless, the sale to the AMC converted

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<sup>3</sup> In 2011, the United Progressive Alliance government introduced the new Land, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill — successor to the much-maligned Land Acquisition Act of 1894. The bill has been sharply criticized, in large part because the state retains sovereign authority to determine what constitutes public purpose.

Baoris' territory into public land, thus transforming the community from renters with semi-formal or customary tenure into extra-legal occupiers of public space.

Baoris do not know what became of their second landlord who, after collecting rents for years, disappeared. Residents maintain that the land running parallel to the city's roadway remains under the private title of an absent proprietor. Requests made by Baori leaders under the Right to Information Act of 2005 revealed no owner on existing municipal property records. This is not a phenomenon unique to Ahmedabad, as vagueness of territorial ownership, writes Bhargava (1983: 18), is common throughout India, with many cities lacking proper documentation of urban land holdings (see also Roy, 2003). The lack of centralized or accessible records means that it is often very difficult to establish the legal ownership of territory. Displaced Baoris argue that if the ownership of land in Gulbai Tekra remains unmapped, the city has no legal right to carry out demolitions. Municipal authorities maintain that the entire area is under the domain of the AMC and that Baoris are illegally occupying public territory. I will return to the production of this ambiguity, but suffice to say it is such regulatory uncertainty which empowers planning authorities to enact what Agamben (1998) describes as the state of exception, which in this context refers to the planning apparatus flexing its sovereign power to suspend Baoris' 'right' as exceptions to the rule of law.

Baoris' displacement was happening in the lead-up to a changing policy terrain designed to produce a 'slum-free' Ahmedabad. In 2010, India's central government announced a national policy, Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY), designed to stimulate low-cost housing for slum dwellers in 250 cities across the country, a response to the doubling of India's slum population in the preceding decade. The launching of RAY was rapidly

followed by Gujarat's government unveiling its Regulations for the Rehabilitation and Redevelopment of the Slums (RRRS) in July 2011 — a new initiative managed by the Urban Development Department, which boldly proclaimed plans for a 'slum-free' Ahmedabad. As a public–private partnership, the RRRS exemplifies what Peck and Tickell (2002) dub 'roll-out neoliberalism', which in this case refers to new models and incentives designed to get private developers into the business of slum redevelopment. Under the RRRS, in return for relocating slum dwellers, the AMC enforces the eviction process and, most critically, raises the allowable floor-space index, which private developers can either use on land cleared of slums or transfer to other projects elsewhere in the city. While it is premature to judge the effects of the RRRS, one fears that it will do little more than formalize the monopoly rights of private capital over Ahmedabad's slumlands (see Government of Gujarat, 2010). Importantly, the AMC retains the authority to determine entitlements, and those excluded from developmental measures (now led by private developers) will be forced to fend for themselves.

Baoris' displacement is not only taking place within a recalibrating policy landscape, but also against the backdrop of a distinct shift in the moral and aesthetic terrain of the metropolis. Since the 1990s, Chatterjee (2008: 62) argues, the willingness of the middle classes to accommodate the urban poor has waned, suggesting that there is a hegemony of 'the logic of corporate capital among the urban middle classes', and thus a consensus has emerged amid Indian elites who have prioritized rapid economic growth and urban regeneration regardless of the human costs. Marked by violence, urban renewal is often being pursued, according to Baviskar (2003: 89–90), through a 'bourgeois environmentalism', which has emerged as an 'organised force' whereby 'upper-class

concerns and aesthetics, leisure, safety, and health have come significantly to shape the disposition of urban spaces'. For Ghertner (2011: 1), this activism represents the efforts of private property owners to 'depict slums as zones of incivility and "nuisance" ', mobilizing to impose middle-class 'norms of civility and civil virtue' and, in doing so, produce 'exclusionary urban imaginaries'. The extent to which middle-class activism has influenced Baoris' eviction remains a project for the future. Nevertheless their displacement is taking place within an urban transformation wherein higher-caste Hindu codes of conduct, aesthetics and territories interface with a powerful legal and popular discourse that forges a correlation between degeneracy and poverty that is utilized to legitimize the erasure of slums under the rhetorical cover of beautification, security and public health.

But what of the 448 Baori families displaced in the 2002 clearances? Baviskar (2003: 96) reminds us that while violent displacement lies at the core of India's urban transformation, the poor's 'hope of permanence' is not always a 'foolhardy fantasy'. In many respects, dislocated Baoris are among the more 'fortunate' given that they successfully fought to obtain access to a state-sponsored resettlement programme. But theirs is a deeply ambiguous 'fortune' — one that traces a distressing geography along the urban–rural fringe.

## **Displacement**

Displaced Baoris were initially relocated to a housing complex in Odhav — an area of concentrated heavy industry on the eastern fringe of the city. Built in 2000 by the Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority (AUDA), the Baori resettlement camp

comprised 1,500 housing units in a series of multi-story tenements. Families were given a small cash payment of 1,000 rupees (US \$20) to offset the costs of displacement.

Informed that this was temporary accommodation, it took the AMC four years to shift Baoris to a second housing complex in Vishala, situated amongst farmers' fields along the southwestern edge of the city.

Conditions for dislocated Baoris could have been much worse had they not secured access to a state-sponsored resettlement programme. In Gujarat, the state has a legal obligation to provide alternative accommodation for displaced populations who can 'prove' their tenure on 'public' land back to 1976. The criteria for accessing such compensation is antiquated in Gujarat, a state which refuses to revise its qualifying date (resulting in the exclusion of many displaced people) despite decades of protest staged by civil rights activists. Rehabilitation policy is rendered even more problematic because over 50%<sup>4</sup> of unauthorized settlements, accounting for approximately 10% of the city's 5.4 million inhabitants, are situated on private land, where it is difficult to access resettlement programmes and *in situ* upgrading schemes (when and where the political will exists to implement such measures). Moreover, the burden is always on the urban poor to verify themselves as eligible populations, a difficult proposition considering a recent UN-Habitat (2003) report suggested that 28% of slum dwellers in Ahmedabad do not possess any form of state-recognized identification (the absence of which makes accessing social welfare provision impossible).

Baoris only qualified for a resettlement programme because they held the necessary documentation: rent receipts dating their tenure in Gulbai Tekra back to the

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<sup>4</sup> Rajendra Joshi, the managing trustee of Saath, a prominent housing NGO in Ahmedabad, puts this figure much higher (at between 70% and 80%).

early 1960s (Figure 1). In working with an indigenous community in Argentina, Gordillo (2006: 162) argues that, as expressions of state power, identification papers are often viewed by subaltern groups as the ‘crucible of citizenship’, possessing the powers required to deflect state violence. Baoris’ tattered rent receipts may not have refracted state violence, but they did enable families to position themselves as eligible beneficiaries of state compensation. Across India, accessing resettlement remains an incredibly fraught process, a quagmire of cut-off dates, identification papers and other requirements that the poor have to navigate, conditions that — if not purposely so designed — are capitalized upon to exclude many when it comes to implementing rehabilitation programmes (Baviskar, 2003; Bhan and Menon-Sen, 2007; Desai, 2012). Illustrating how resettlement in the city is rife with violence and exclusion, I return to Baoris’ experiences of displacement, their relocation tracing a distressing spatiality along Ahmedabad’s urban–rural frontier.

### **Splintering urbanisms**

It is a long drive from the inner city to the Baori resettlement colony out on the urban–rural periphery. One has to follow the Sabarmati river southward as the business district merges into residential neighbourhoods, which in turn give way to farmland.

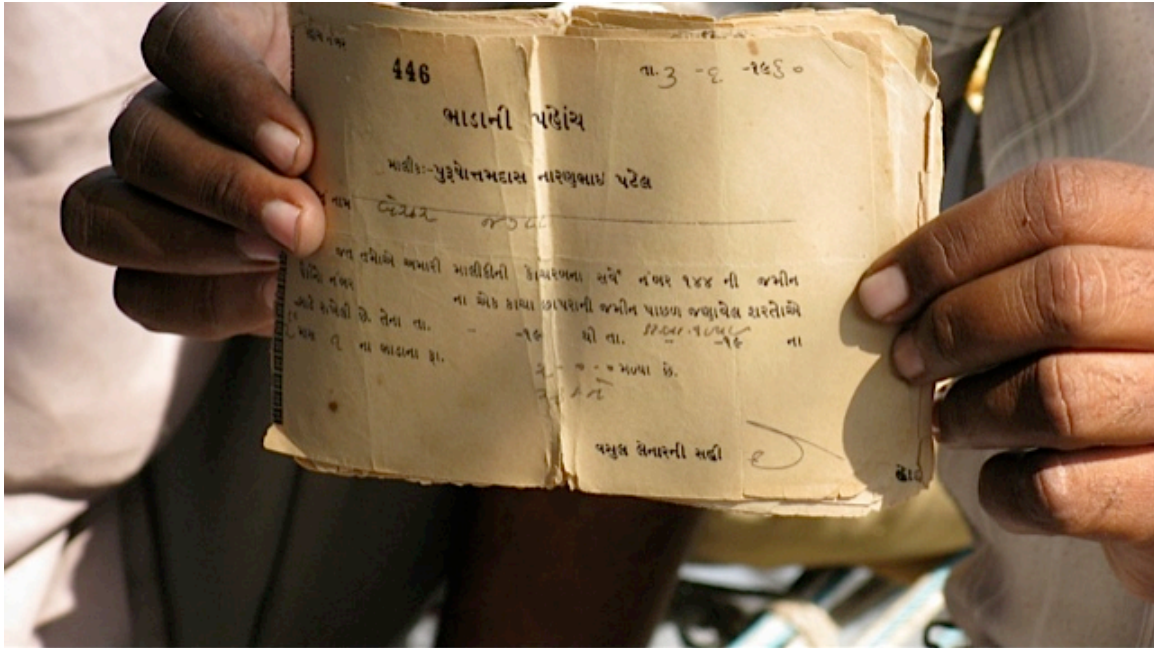


Figure 1: Rent receipts. Photograph by author.

Along this route, large informal settlements flank each side of the highway leading out of town, forming the kind of makeshift landscape that is all too common across India's urban peripheries: tent cities on the roadsides where the varied pioneers of the urban occupy territory in their bid to stake claims in the metropolis. Blurring the divide between city and countryside, this landscape gives shape to what Davis (2004: 7) describes as the 'urban-rural continuum' producing 'new species of urbanism'. This is India's frontier of sweat and toil: its frontline of wood and plastic, cardboard and hammered tin; of mud bricks and rag picking; of scant infrastructure and extreme environmental pressures.

Here, then, was Breman's (2006: 141) 'slumlands' where the 'foot-slogging infantry of the global economy [is] deprived of the basic means of human existence'. This is where Lefebvre (1989) describes, rather despondently, the city losing itself within 'une métamorphose planétaire', a global urban metamorphosis in which the urban centre now generates its own periphery — the industrialization of cities usurped by the



urbanization process itself (Merrifield, 2011). This is a metamorphosis prompting Davis (2004: 23) to suggest that there has been a marked uncoupling of urbanization and industrialization, with the urban edge increasingly the 'dumping ground for a surplus population'. This is where, according to Roy (2003: 145), 'liberalization gnaws on the boundaries of the urban', where cities degrade traditional forms of labour, leaving rural migrants and dislocated urbanites in search of work that no longer exists. It is an 'alien habitat', argues Merrifield (2011: 105) that has become 'neither meaningfully urban nor rural; the result of a vicious process of dispossession, sucking people into the city while spitting others out of the gentrifying centre, forcing poor urban old-timers and vulnerable newcomers onto an expanding periphery'.

Situated along the Sabarmati river's fertile plain, the Baori resettlement colony emerges unexpectedly, a dozen towers rising up from the surrounding grazing land (Figure 2). Life on the urban periphery is hard for Baoris, and their displacement has produced a set of issues that exacerbate their precarious situation. There are no paved roads, streetlights, schools or clinics anywhere in the vicinity. The complex's close proximity to the river poses health risks. Flooding is not unusual during the annual monsoon, bringing with it disease. Clogged storm drains — choked with filthy standing water — are a breeding ground for cholera, dysentery and dengue fever. With no organized garbage disposal or sewer infrastructure, waste is thrown into adjacent fields and residents must defecate outside. The conditions of resettlement were such that it was only those individuals providing proof of tenure in Gulbai Tekra back to 1976 who were eligible for resettlement. It was nonetheless striking to find families of ten or more crowded into 12 x 12 foot rooms. When I last visited the resettlement colony in 2009, it

was less than 3 years old, and yet its electrical circuits were failing, water pumps were broken and cement foundations were cracked — all of this in a major earthquake zone. It is unclear who is responsible for the provision of services and maintenance of infrastructure. Baoris claim that no municipal worker has ever visited the area. The provision of some services, the absence of many others, the not knowing who is responsible, invokes Rose's (1999) sense that 'self-responsibilization' is a central operating mechanism of liberalization, meaning the poor are left to negotiate services as best they can.



Figure 2 Resettlement colony. Photograph by author.

Perhaps the most detrimental effect of Baoris' displacement has been a dramatic attenuation in their spheres of social and economic reproduction. Speaking of the importance of remaining in the inner city, a Baori named Suresh observed: 'The fact is that this place [Gulbai Tekra] is in an area where we can earn. Here . . . there are more wealthy people living . . . There are a lot of people in areas like C.G. Road, Law Gardens, Nehrunagar, which are nearby here, where people crowd in the evenings. And at these places we can do business by selling our statues and earn some money' (interview with the author, 10 January 2009). Simply put, resettlement has disrupted their ability to eke

out a subsistence living as artisans, domestics and hawkers. Baoris now have to strategize ways of commuting into the city, which is challenging given that there is no form of public transport (bus or train) connecting the housing colony to the city proper. Many Baoris interviewed during this research testified to acute financial problems ensuing from resettlement, with many having exhausted meagre savings, mortgaged wedding jewelry or taken loans from predatory moneylenders.

Importantly, depositing Baoris out to the urban edge has informalized their access to territory and services. For those in Ahmedabad who do manage to access state compensation in the wake of urban renewal, resettlement programmes may seem to represent ambitious plans that include state-sponsored infrastructure and promises of tenure and civic amenities. In practice, for Baoris, relocation to the urban–rural periphery has epitomized a mode of land redistribution whereby the state has deliberately kept entitlements in a state of ambiguity — a regulatory miasma that makes it effectively impossible to re-establish entitlements. In doing so, the Gujarati state is creating the conditions that circumscribe access to resources and keep vulnerable populations on the move. During the 2002 evictions — carried out under police supervision — Baoris were coerced into signing notarized documents whereby they agreed to the conditions of eviction and resettlement. Displaced families opted to sign, but did so without legal counsel and under threat of public beatings, reinforced by the presence of Ahmedabad police armed with *lathi* sticks. The AMC collected Baoris’ existing documentation (namely rent receipts) to prevent any future claim to territory in the area. Baoris were issued with new below-the-poverty-line ration cards (providing access to the state’s public distribution system) but a decade later these remain valid only in Odhav (the site

of their initial relocation); thus Baoris are left having to traverse the entire city — from its southwestern to eastern fringe — in order to obtain subsidized food and fuel. Contrary to promises made by the AMC, relocated families have not been given the guarantee of tenure, formal property rights, nor (critically) have they been able to secure vital documentation papers. For instance, Torrent Power (a private utility company which purchased the Ahmedabad Electricity Company in 1997) supplies Baoris with electricity, but refuses to issue bills in residents' individual names, issuing them only by housing unit number. This action effectively denies Baoris one of the few means they have of proving that they are authorized residents of the housing complex, and many now fear that the AMC will use the absence of identification papers as a pretext for refusing compensation in future evictions.

The AMC has assured Baoris that they will not be displaced from Vishala in the immediate future. It is not an entirely comforting guarantee. There is little doubt that, when it becomes attractive for capital to transform this territory, Baoris will be forced to relocate. 'In the global city', Suresh keenly observed, 'there is no place for slums. We will have to go to the outskirts of the city . . . to areas such as Sanand near Chagodar Highway. We will have to move again, that is sure' (interview with the author, 15 March 2009). As urban nomads in twenty-first-century Gujarat, Suresh points to a future of enforced mobility along the ever-shifting urban–rural frontier, and his identification of 'Sanand near Chagodar Highway' is significant. It projects Baoris' forced march southwards from Vishala, moving the community close to a recently established 1,100-

hectare industrial zone, home to the Tata Nano factory, where the assembly line rolls out the Nano — the world's cheapest car.<sup>5</sup>

### **Production of elite space and ritualized violence**

It would be a mistake to suggest that informal processes are the sole terrain of the urban poor as informality reaches across Ahmedabad's socioeconomic spectrum. 'The splintering of urbanism', argues Roy (2009b: 82), 'does not take place at the fissure between formality and informality, but rather, in fractal fashion, within the informalized production of space'. Less than 30 minutes' drive from the Baori resettlement colony, at the crossroads of S.G. Highway and Satellite Road, it is tempting to imagine that one has arrived in an altogether different city. Along Ahmedabad's western periphery, farmers' fields and resettlement colonies give way to other forms of legal and extra-legal subdivisions, to gated residential bungalows and cyber cafes, private members' clubs and new shopping complexes. Islands of exclusive territory are being carved out, a lifestyle and landscape seductively marketed in the neon lights broadcasting the promise of a new India — an urban horizon that disrupts older imaginings of the Third World metropolis long narrated through the imagery and language of disease and death. Out on this fringe, an urban resurrection is being driven by Harvey's (2008: 34) 'accumulation by dispossession', driven by financial capital and the growing middle classes in one of India's powerhouse economic states.

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<sup>5</sup> Tata's relocation to Gujarat followed on the heels of a protracted conflict along another urban-rural frontier in the town of Singur. Following fears over an escalating political maelstrom, Tata Motors fled West Bengal and found a haven in Gujarat. The area around Sanand is now set to become the fastest-growing hub of auto manufacturing in India, with memorandums of understanding signed with Ford Motors and PSA Peugeot Citroen, and ongoing discussions with Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai and Hero Honda. Details of the public subsidies underwriting this corporate development have largely remained out of the public sphere.

Informalization looms no less in the production of this topography than in the Baoris' unauthorized *basti* or resettlement camp. Often working in direct violation of zoning policies, Ahmedabad's construction industry sketches an informal geography connected to the highest levels of political power and to the machinery of the planning apparatus. By the 1980s, argues Yagnik (1983: 112–13), a noted Gujarati historian, the city witnessed the emergence 'of a new class of quasi-criminal entrepreneurs capable of illegally occupying open land through their powerful political connections . . . [I]t is not unusual to meet at Ahmedabad a slumlord-turned-builder who at the same time is a municipal councilor or office-bearer of a national political party'. The activities of private developers may constitute the single largest industry profiteering from the informalization of urban property. The building of 'unregulated' housing and commercial space runs rampant across Ahmedabad, and is often pursued in contravention of existing codes, bylaws and town planning models designed to govern the use, access and ownership of urban territories. These kinds of extra-legal developments are no less informal but possess remarkably different modalities of legitimacy; such renewal, while built extra-legally, is routinely regularized by municipal authorities, who levy nominal 'impact' fees in return for legalization.

The informalized production of elite space can have serious consequences. In a survey conducted for the World Institute for Disaster Risk Management, Vatsa (2001) argues that within the jurisdiction of the AMC, 200 out of 450 multi-story buildings were constructed without the requisite permits, a situation worse still in those areas under the administration of AUDA, with only 25 of 200 complexes having secured legal permissions from planning authorities. The report was produced amidst a flurry of news

stories and public outrage that erupted in the aftermath of Gujarat's 2001 earthquake. In Ahmedabad alone, this cataclysmic event resulted in the death of 700 people and the collapse of 80 buildings, including dozens of high-rise structures built within the previous 5 years. The fallout led to court action revealing builders' use of inadequate steel and sand-diluted cement, construction on soft soil, and shortcuts taken in the setting of cement (Spodek, 2001). This kind of informal landscape proliferates along Ahmedabad's urban-rural interface, where the city's construction barons have enjoyed decades of acquiescence from AUDA, which has seemingly done little to enforce building codes, condemn fraudulent practices or ensure the efficient execution of town planning. The urban edge is equally the site where developers deploy more insidious tactics to acquire land. The 'use of force is fairly common', writes Patel (1995: 144), 'when developers are dealing with farmers in the periphery of the city . . . it is widely believed that developers make use of communal and political riots to get rid of troublesome tenants or squatters'. Patel is well positioned to know, given that he is one of Ahmedabad's premier architects who is leading the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project — a colossal urban renewal project reclaiming both sides of the river in the city centre. Similar sentiments are echoed by Breman (2004: 230), who suggests, having long documented the unmaking of unionized labour in Ahmedabad, that 'the criminalization of politics and corruption of public authority have assumed disturbing proportions and undermine not only the constitutional state, but also the democratic fabric as a whole . . . the government can do nothing to bring this extra-legal situation under control — bureaucrats and politicians are in fact party to its expansion'.

In Ahmedabad, the criminalization of the ‘democratic fabric’ is entangled with a hostile Hindu nationalism that erupts in vicious public violence. It is impossible to consider issues relating to informality and displacement outside of the ethno-religious violence that has targeted the city’s Muslim populations, many of whom are now segregated in particular areas of the city, such as Juhapura (next to the Baoris’ resettlement colony), commonly described in popular discourse as ‘little Pakistan’. The forced ghettoization of Muslims is widespread, witnessed most starkly in Ahmedabad’s 2002 riots, when thousands of Muslims were murdered, their properties pillaged and burned by marauding Hindu mobs spurred on by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and state officials. The depth of state actors’ involvement in the 2002 carnage continues to unfold under the auspices of the Special Investigation Team established by the Supreme Court of India in 2009. Evidence produced by civil rights organizations has led to criminal indictments against Jaideep Patel, a VHP leader, several senior Ahmedabad police officers and, strikingly, Mayaben Kodnani — Gujarat’s Women and Child Welfare minister. In 2008, the Citizens for Justice and Peace filed a criminal complaint in the Supreme Court charging 63 state actors in connection to the 2002 violence, including Chief Minister Narendra Modi, 11 cabinet ministers, 3 BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) members of the Legislative Assembly, and 38 Indian Police Service and Indian Administrative Service officers (Jaffrelot, 2012).

In the immediate aftermath of the 2002 riots, the Concerned Citizens Tribunal — led by retired Supreme Court judge V.R. Iyer — reported that over 100,000 Muslims had sought sanctuary in the ‘relief’ camps established by charity organizations. Many of these camps were situated on the urban periphery and, a decade later, have become permanent



informal settlements. By all accounts, their conditions mirror those in the Baoris' resettlement colony (Chandhoke, 2010). Such conditions prompted the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) to recommend in 2006 that displaced Muslims be granted the status of Internally Displaced Persons and given compensation akin to that provided after Gujarat's 2001 earthquake (NCM, 2006). The Government of Gujarat (2006) flatly rejected the findings of the NCM, arguing that Muslims residing in 'relief' camps did so of their own volition (Badigar, 2012); the displacement of Muslims was thus re-scripted by the state as an instance of voluntary migration, part of the natural trajectory of the urbanization process.

Gujarat's state-sponsored persecution of minorities continues to provoke much protest and attention (Corbridge and Harriss, 2000; Mahadevia, 2002; Shani, 2007; Jaffrelot, 2012). It is invoked to demonstrate how liberalization, renewal and Hindu nationalism intersect to enact varied forms of violence within the informalized production of urban territory. Documenting the 'decosmopolitanization' of Mumbai in the 1990s, Appadurai (2000: 630) argues that we are witnessing the 'hypermateralization' of the urban citizenry 'through ethnic mobilization and public violence'. He draws a direct correlation between industrial reorganization, informal housing and the ritualized violence of the politicized Hindu right, which is mobilized to carry out an urban cleansing reconfiguring Indian cities of the future as 'sacred national space, ethnically pure but globally competitive' (*ibid.*: 644). This is as, or perhaps more, applicable to Ahmedabad, a city scarred by significant violence, suggesting a deeper problematic, one that Swyngedouw (2011: 370) describes as the emergence of the 'post-political' — the eclipse of democratic rights and spaces as global capital consolidates a 'post-democratic

socio-spatial configuration'. It is tempting to script Ahmedabad as one such 'post-democratic' spatiality, a city where many — if not most — live in some form of extra-legality, where over 125,000 unionized workers have been ejected from textile manufacturing, a city that continues to witness state-sponsored ethnic cleansing. This is perhaps a terrain where the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1974) has morphed into an urban metamorphosis (Lefebvre, 1989) stripping away the democratic potential of cities where, according to Merrifield (2011: 108), we no longer have citizens, but rather rightless spaceless subjects 'cut off from the past but somehow excluded from the future; deadened by the daily grind of hustling a living'. Here, then, are the (undifferentiated) urban subjects rendered vulnerable by global capital within an expanding global urban transformation, a vein of theorizing that takes its most virulent form in Agamben's (1998) provocative suggestion that we are living in a time where the dominant political model is no longer the city but that of the concentration camp; we are all now subjects, or rather detainees awaiting our biometrics to be collected and rights suspended.

But what room does this vision of the city leave for agency? For understanding the particular places in which struggles for political, social and economic justice take place? Within the 'post-political', we begin to lose sight of several spheres of political negotiation: firstly, how formal rights and protections remain sites of significant organizing; and secondly, even where claims have been suspended or where the institutions of civil society have had little concrete meaning, there nonetheless exists an expansive field of popular politics. It is this field that informs what follows, and I return to Baoris' efforts to organize within the informalized production of territory. I draw on Chatterjee's (2004) influential framework of 'political society' to expand notions of the

political, and I end by complicating the informal world as a site of possible democratization.

### **Popular politics in the ‘post-political’ city**

In an effort to unearth how ‘rights’ are negotiated in the informalizing world, Chatterjee (2004; 2008; 2009) proposes ‘political society’ as a realm of politics operating within the inability of the structures of modern government in India (and beyond) to deliver the tenets of liberal citizenship. ‘What sense does it make to use the forms of modern law and modern administrative procedures’, suggests Chatterjee (2009), ‘on populations that cannot survive if you simply insist on the protection of private property, equality of law, freedom of contract and these kinds of things? Most of these people would simply die or they would rise in revolt and break down the whole structure’. Political society is offered to understand an immense landscape of popular politics taking place outside the structures of formal rights and the metropolitan institutions of civil society. Just as legislative protections cannot be applied universally, there are nonetheless vast numbers who must be governed. The only reason government continues to function is because its local agents adapt to negotiate the claims of groups living beyond the pale of legality. It is because so many of the world’s poor labour in informal economies and inhabit territory through various forms of illicit tenure that they must be governed as exceptions to the rule of law. It is within the exception that populations can bargain for entitlements with state and capital, and for Chatterjee (2004: 25) this represents a space for radical democratization: ‘By seeking to find real ethical spaces for their operation in heterogeneous time, the incipient resistances to that order may succeed in inventing new

terms of political justice'. The success of such 'incipient resistance' depends not on asserting the rights of individual citizens, but rather the organizing of populations contesting the politics of governance. It is the operations of government, claims Chatterjee (*ibid.*: 76), that can create 'the conditions not for a contraction of but rather an expansion of democratic political participation'.

Baoris demonstrate many of the conditions and strategies that constitute political society. They have siphoned off electricity, and secured running water by paying bribes to municipal workers. Baoris occupy land as unauthorized squatters with no recognized rights of tenure, and labour in transgression of existing civic regulations. Central to this discussion are their efforts to contest their displacement from the inner city. In the events leading up the 2002 evictions, Baoris instituted the Akhil Baori Samaj (ABS), a local association representing the collective interests of the community. Chatterjee (2004) argues that such associations are instrumental to the success of the poor, given that they can function to mediate settlements with capital and state. 'Those in political society', writes Chatterjee (2008: 12), 'make their claim on government, and are in turn governed, not within the framework of constitutionally defined rights and laws, but rather through temporary, contextual and unstable arrangements arrived at through direct political negotiations'.

The ABS was formed as a means by which residents sought to negotiate with AMC officials and Anil Bakeri, the private company seeking to transform the area into middle-class residential apartments. The first action of the ABS was to bring their struggle to the attention of elected officials. Agency in political society often depends upon exerting pressure on those in government, but elected representatives were

indifferent and inaccessible to Baoris. 'We are poor people', Modevbhai, a Baori elder, concluded: 'How can we meet such leaders?' (interview with the author, 5 February 2009). Laxmiben, a Baori educator who teaches 50 children in her 14x14 foot home, was more explicit:

Here, where we are living, they demolish our homes. When we go on the streets to sell our products, they don't allow us to sit there. There is no question about any help from them. The government has not even come here to see our plight or [the] conditions we live in. Or even to know that a community exists in Gulbai Tekra . . . They treat us like goats and sheep, like animals. Neither Congress nor the BJP help us in any way (interview with the author, 3 April 2009).

The ABS took a second action following the 2002 evictions. They mapped their community space. Employing self-enumeration as a tactic, Baoris conducted a population count and measured the square footage of individual homes. 'Nobody can survey correctly unless our representative is present', Chamanbhai explained: 'They [the AMC] miss houses. The survey people never take an interest in making a correct list . . . they go into two houses, then leave one or two out. They're scared to go inside. They don't like going inside. They don't go deep inside; so the survey is improper. They make it to fool us' (interview with the author, 20 January 2009). As a leader of the ABS, Chamanbhai raises concerns over Baoris being excluded in the measurements of state power, arguing that there has never been a concerted effort by 'those survey people' to produce an accurate numerical representation of the community. Surveying their community space suggests a rationale rooted in political society. 'We have made a list of each family's details, showing the number of children, married, and otherwise', Suresh described, 'We have made detailed files about each family. Our united effort is to get two rooms with a kitchen per family, along with other amenities . . . We will give the rest of the land to the government if they agree' (interview with the author, 15 March 2009).

Community enumeration was thus designed to strengthen the bargaining position of the ABS when negotiating compensation. With no recognized rights to land, Baoris are ready to settle a mutually beneficial agreement with the AMC and Anil Bakeri. 'It's understood that the builder, Anil Bakeri, is having the presale deed for this area', Chamanbahi reiterated, 'he has sent message that, "if you want to leave this place, I will give you land and money". We are not refusing the offer, but this is difficult as there is mistrust among our people. So we have to think twice before going to the builder' (interview with the author, 20 January 2009). Regrettably, the AMC has expressed no interest in any form of dialogue with the ABS, and direct negotiations with capital can be fraught. In some cases, it may be possible to extract concessions from private real estate developers who are keen to avoid court proceedings and protracted conflicts. But Baoris remain suspicious of negotiating with Anil Bakeri, largely because the company offered bribes to the leadership of the ABS in exchange for using its considerable influence to convince residents to vacate the area voluntarily.

Baoris' (in)ability to contest the informalization of their claims has been further constrained. According to Chatterjee, maneuvering to assert entitlements often depends upon securing one's visibility as a recognized population. He thus draws a sharp distinction between citizens and populations — the former are framed within the imagined space of the nation state whose rights are protected by the rule of law, the latter inhabit the heterogeneity of the social and constitute the real terrain of democratic politics — they are the only usable categories of biopower, which must produce aggregates of people who are the targets of policy designed to ensure security and welfare. 'While the political fraternity of citizens had to be constantly affirmed as one and indivisible',

Chatterjee (2004: 35–6) argues, ‘there is no one entity of the governed. There was always a multiplicity of population groups that were the objects of governmentality — multiple targets with multiple characteristics requiring multiple techniques of administration’.

Baoris have long struggled to establish themselves as a legitimate population within the administrative structures of state power. This is striking given that one of their unique characteristics is that, unlike many others in political society, Baoris are not a mixed inter-caste community whose identity and moral authority is forged out of the shared occupation of land. ‘Our community’, argues Suresh, ‘is one that has a unique language and ways of living, and is of a completely different kind’ (interview with the author, 15 March 2009). ‘We are from the Baori community’, Chamanbhai states: ‘We will not prefer to stay with, for example, the Thakor community, which is just in front of us. We will not permit them to live with us. We will not permit them to stay with us. This is because our customs, rules and regulations are different’ (interview with the author, 20 January 2009). While there may be an argument suggesting that this marked social and territorial difference limits Baoris’ willingness to connect with other vulnerable groups to stage a broader oppositional politics, I do not preclude the possibility for solidarity across identity formations, although (to my knowledge) this has yet to happen in Baori Samaj.

‘I was born here’, Kalu, a young Baori, recalled: ‘as far as I know we came from Rajasthan, from Jodpur . . . We came here and then spread out to various places like Jamnagar, Rajkot, Probandar, Veraval, Junagadh and many other places all over Saurashtra . . . Initially we were known as Marwaris’ (interview with the author, 17 February 2009). Kalu reinstates Baoris’ migration and draws critical attention to the Gujarati state’s erroneous classification of the community as a Marwari caste population.

Laxmiben summarizes the implications for Baoris of not having their status as a

Scheduled Tribe recognized within the administrative schematics of government:

The government does not consider us in any type of caste or tribe. They say we don't have any caste as such . . . So we don't get benefits. On the other side, they tell us we are from an upper-caste Marwari community, 'You are rich enough. You're good'. [But] in reality, we are from Baori Samaj, so there is no special quota for the education of our kids, no special quota for government jobs . . . To prove yourself as backward, you need to have a certificate. And that certificate shows you as a Backward Caste, OBC, SC, ST, whatever the section is . . . We have submitted and applied to the Samaj Kalyan Kendra, social welfare centre. They have the whole list of Brahmins, Kashatriyas and Patels. [But] they don't have our names inside that list, and our existence is now a question. We are considered to be Marwari people, which fall into a higher caste. And that's the problem. We are from Baori Samaj, and we don't have any existence in government records (interview with the author, 3 April 2009).

Laxmiben narrates a complex politics of recognition; to briefly summarize, she highlights

Baoris' exclusion from the population categories Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled

Castes (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC), which represent the aggregates listed in

India's constitution to whom the Indian state has a legal obligation to provide social

welfare. Baoris in Gulbai Tekra do exist within governmental categories managed by

Gujarat's Social Welfare Department, but their status as a Scheduled Tribes population

remains unrecognized. They are governed within a different caste classification.

Following its founding as an independent linguistic state in 1960, the broader ethnic

category of Baori was listed within Gujarat's *Baskhi Panch* — its schedule identifying

104 OBC populations for whom 27% of all public sector jobs and places in educational

institutions are reserved. Even if Baoris in Gulbai Tekra managed to have their OBC

status recognized, it is doubtful that this would be of significant benefit. Given the

staggering heterogeneity of OBC groups (which comprise over 40% of Gujarat's

population), these particular Baoris are not in a position to compete with other OBC



populations, many of whom fare much better in terms of political connections, incomes and education.

On the other hand, if Baoris were recognized as an ST population, they would stand a much greater chance of accessing assistance programmes, which include educational scholarships, small business and home improvement grants, and, most centrally, the state's reservation system — India's version of affirmative action — which reserves quotas for ST, SC and OBC populations in educational institutions, elected political assemblies and public sector jobs. As things stand, Baoris in Gulbai Tekra have been excluded from a developmental apparatus instituted in the early independence period to further the socioeconomic improvement of specific populations. Unable to pursue higher levels of education and training, or obtain political power and civil service positions, Baoris have remained locked in low-paying insecure jobs in Ahmedabad's informal economies. This exclusion, coupled with insecure land tenure, has rendered the community acutely vulnerable within an informalizing metropolis.

### **The limits of informal politics**

The multiple sites of Baoris' organizing suggest a terrain that complicates any dichotomy hewn between the formal and informal, the legal and extra-legal, the civil and the political. Firstly, the formal order of things has retained some meaning for Baoris. Until the 1960s, they possessed customary tenure, and claims continue to be made around this territorial ambiguity. They have managed to acquire ration cards and, during the 2002 evictions, Baoris secured a stay order from the High Court of Gujarat, even if this failed to halt the AMC from enacting its slum clearance. While relocation is leading to

aggravated socioeconomic marginalization, Baoris have nonetheless accessed a state-sponsored resettlement programme (many in the city are less 'fortunate'). Lastly, Baoris continue to press for inclusion within the population schematics around which various developmental measures are structured in India. That said, as I have argued throughout, Baoris' inclusion within the formal urban order has not only been marginal at best, but also significantly eroded within the informalized production of territory and governance in liberalizing Ahmedabad. These conditions reflect Roy's (2009b: 80) sensibility that 'the ever-shifting relationship between what is legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate, authorized and unauthorized . . . is both arbitrary and fickle and yet it is a site of considerable state power and violence'.

Baoris' experiences also sit uneasily within the kinds of political opportunities that are sometimes ascribed to the urban poor living and working within the informalizing world — the potential for radical democratization that Chatterjee suggests is possible within political society. I do not want to figure a model that determines success or failure, but geography matters when it comes to negotiating claims with state and capital. 'Success' is far more likely if a community can establish itself as a recognized population, has well-organized leadership, support from the middle classes, and where struggles are situated in sites around which media, activists and NGOs coalesce. Many of these conditions are absent in Baori Samaj. They are in a precarious bargaining position. As their collective numbers are small, and less than 50% of Baoris in Gulbai Tekra appear on electoral registers, the community has been unable to mobilize their 'vote bank' to place pressure on elected officials. Those displaced to the urban-rural fringe no longer occupy valuable inner-city territory, and their struggles have not

garnered the attention of sympathetic middle classes or NGOs through which their entitlements could be brokered with state agencies. There has thus been little opportunity to establish a 'politics of partnership' that Appadurai (2001: 24) argues can lead to 'deep democracy' (*ibid.*: 32) or what Roy (2009a: 159) describes as a politics of inclusion that opens up new forms of 'civic governmentality'.

Baoris' displacement focuses the limits for agency in the informalizing metropolis, particularly when situated within the spatial entanglement of liberalization, Hindu nationalism and urban restructuring taking hold in Ahmedabad. The community's eviction and relocation illustrates the uneasy ground upon which agreements rest in political society. As it has become attractive to develop land in Gulbai Tekra, Baoris' capacity to be governed as an exception has been suspended. The pressures of gentrification, a progressively hostile policy terrain facilitating urban renewal driven by private capital, and judicial recalibrations mean that those living in extra-legal conditions are increasingly stuck between a rock and a hard place in Ahmedabad. Not only has the ambiguity of rights and territories facilitated Baoris' expulsion, but it has also enabled the AMC to suspend the very possibility of accessing resources. It is now difficult for Baoris to use their ration cards; basic services are not being provided to their resettlement colony; and the city government has not delivered on the promise of regularized tenure. With no documentation papers, Baoris possess no physical means to prove their status on the urban periphery.

The above offers a cautionary tale for those working to map an alternative sphere of justice within the informalizing metropolis; Baoris' displacement demonstrates that what for Chatterjee (2004) represents a space with potential for radical democratization is

also a space rife with violence. ‘Coercion and violence’, writes Ghosh (2006: 525), ‘remain unmentioned as he [Chatterjee] struggles to lay out a terrain of governmentality that seems to always operate through recognition, dialogue, mutually agreed-on settlements, and inclusion . . . these heterogeneous Others seem to always find their designated slots in the planners’ map through a much contested but “negotiated” process’. Baoris temper enthusiasm for political society as a site for inclusive democratic politics. Their eviction and resettlement draw sharp attention to those heterogeneous Others whose lives are marked by the instrumental role of violence, and the way that the accelerated suspension of ‘rights’ are capitalized upon to enact urban and governmental transformation. Despite numerous attempts to work through legal and extra-legal channels, Baoris’ displacement has yet to be negotiated; their designated slot on the planner’s map succinctly narrated by one Baori woman who argued simply that: ‘The government has thrown us away like garbage’ (personal correspondence with the author, 10 March 2009).

Within the terrain of liberalizing India, Chatterjee (2008) insists that political society will continue to offer space for democratic negotiation and for realizing alternative forms of justice. Just as economic liberalization reproduces the informal city, in which the state retains the sovereign authority to determine inclusion and exclusion, it remains necessary to govern the poor. ‘It is in political society’, argues Chatterjee (*ibid.*: 62), ‘that they have to be fed and clothed and given work, if only to ensure the long-term and relatively peaceful well-being of civil society’. How will the retrenching state continue to adapt to govern outside the formal democratic order? How will its local agents regulate the claims and counter-claims of populations in order to quell the threat of

urban insurrection? It remains to be seen. Political society will continue to have explanatory effect as an existing sphere of negotiation churning outside the rules, regulations and institutions of formal governance; any number of contextual, provisional arbitrations will persist within the accelerated informalization of urban territories.

Baoris' experiences, however, suggest reservations concerning the democratizing potential of political society, and the dichotomous division it hews between the formal and informal, the civil and political. While Chatterjee explicates how extra-legal populations attempt to establish a moral legitimacy in lieu of formal rights, are not subaltern groups often dependent on accessing existing social welfare provisions, subject categories and governmental structures (caste certificates, scheduled reservations, resettlement programmes) — the very measures under significant strain in liberalizing Gujarat? Baoris are not seeking to assert themselves within regimes of informality and illegality, but rather are working within these regimes out of necessity to be recognized as a population with lawful and legitimate claims to constitutional rights, democratic protections and critical developmental resources.

This article has also argued that if political society denotes a realm of claim-making beyond the pale of legality, it is surely not the sole domain of the poor, but rather a sphere of politics encompassing the entire socioeconomic hierarchy of the city. '[I]t is members of the so-called civil society', argue Baviskar and Sundar (2008: 88), 'who break laws with impunity and who demand that the rules be waived for them, whereas members of political society strive to become legal, to gain recognition and entitlements from the state'. These politics have been grounded in an understanding of the informal as a mode of urbanization composed of a dense network of transactions and economies in

which 'rights' are often lubricated by cash and political connections, and under threat of violence. If political society is the space in which the poor are increasingly forced to fight for entitlements, it is equally endemic to the informalized production of the metropolis, which in Ahmedabad is rife with racialized violence. Within this expanding landscape, it remains extremely uncertain what opportunities will be left for Baoris to negotiate their place in the city at a time when their claims are unmapped, their territory is usurped, and where they are increasingly rendered unable to access the resources and instruments of state power.

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